*Special 8-Page Issue on Vietnam*

**For Official Mythology of the War and the Testimony of Independent Observers, See Boxes**

# I. F. Stone's Bi-Weekly

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# Will New Chances for Peace Be Another Lost Opportunity?

The history of Indochina since the war has been a history of lost opportunities. Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh worked closely with the OSS during the second World War, and took FDR's promises of colonial liberation seriously. So pro-American was its orientation at one time that, as Oliver E. Clubb, Jr., writes in his *The U.S. and the Sino-Soviet Bloc in South East Asia* (Brookings, 1962), "Vietnam's declaration of independence began with lines from America's own Declaration of Independence and its first constitution more closely resembled that of the U.S. than that of the Soviet Union." Hopes of American support were dashed when the Truman Administration acquiesced in France's effort to restore colonial rule. Ellen J. Hammer in her book, *The Struggle for Indochina* (Stanford, 1952) tells the story of another blasted Vietminh hope. Ho Chi Minh risked his political leadership to reach a moderate agreement with the French on March 6, 1946, accepting a limited independence within the French Union. Because of this agreement the Viet Minh permitted the French to reoccupy Hanoi without a shot being fired. The French troops "fresh from the liberation of Paris" were hailed "as the incarnation of Free France." But French promises were broken, and a war began that was to cost France $5 billion dollars and the blood of many of her best young professional soldiers before Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva agreement marked her defeat 8 years later.

### Ho Ready to Accept An Independent South

Another of these opportunities is now being lost. The international situation makes this a favorable moment to negotiate an end of the war with China and North Vietnam. The latter would like resumption of its normal trade relations with the South; it fears expansion of the war would risk destruction of its resources by American bombardment and end its precarious independence of China. The most important revelation in Bernard B. Fall's forthcoming book *The Two Viet-Nams* (Praeger, 1963) is that the North Vietnamese leaders in three interviews given Westerners last year (the London *Daily Express* in March, Dr. Fall in July and Col. Jules Roy of *L'Express* in December) made it obvious to all three that North Vietnam "had backed away from outright conquest of South Vietnam and was veering toward a negotiated solution embodying the existence of a neutral South Vietnamese state that would not be reunited with the North for a long time to come."

A representative of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam in a clandestine interview with Georges Chaffard of *Le Monde* (Aug. 24) during his visit to Saigon last summer also set forth a program for an independent South Vietnam to be established in free elections. "We have not fought all these years, in the worst conditions," he told M. Chaffard, "to end by replacing one dictatorship with another. None of us can accept a relation of dependence on the North." The domestic program outlined was a moderate one, with a friendly attitude toward foreign investments. "We wish to be realists," M. Chaffard was told. "We know the difficulties of our compatriots in the North, and we have also studied the example of the states of Black Africa. There is no question of wishing to install systematically a Popular Democracy in the South. . . ." The desire is for a neutral regime which can deal with both sides in economic development. Both Peking and Hanoi last year called for reconvening the Geneva Conference to make peace in South Vietnam. For North Vietnam a neutral regime in the South would enable it again to exchange its coal and industrial products for the rice of the South. If East and West Germany can do an enormous trade, despite sharp political differences, why not North and South

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*Another Official Myth*

### Those Lovely Strategic Hamlets

**"The strategic hamlet program is producing excellent results. . . . The hamlets are governed by councils elected by secret ballot. In addition . . . the government is supplying the hamlets with schools, medical aid, cheap fertilizer, low interest agricultural loans. . . . Morale in the countryside has begun to rise. . . ."**

*—Secretary Rusk's April 22 speech on Vietnam.*

**"Not far from the town of Vinh Long is the model strategic hamlet of Phuoc Nguon. . . . Life is regimented in Phuoc Nguon. As in every other strategic hamlet, those who know what is good for them join the regime's National Revolutionary Movement, the only political organization permitted in the hamlets. . . .**

**"The lack of democratic rights exercises the villagers only to the point that they rarely appreciate the appointed village chiefs. But the evidence suggests that they do resent the demands made upon their time and labor. The average peasant today is required to spend almost as much time on unproductive and unpaid government work as he spends in the fields. His basic freedoms may be no less than they were in the past, but he is now obliged to suffer an almost commune-like regimentation. . . .**

**"The peasants need permits to leave the hamlets. They are watched, spied on. . . . Like the peasants in Viet Cong villages, they are required to listen to hours of political indoctrination each week. The rice they grow fetches a low price and is sold by the government for a high price. . . . The result has often been unhappy. 'Too many lessons are being copied from the Communists in the strategic hamlets,' said one Westerner who had come to Vietnam to help Diem win the war."**

*—Denis Warner: The Last Confucian (1963).*



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Vietnam, especially since such trade would go a long way toward ending the trade deficits of both? For China, looking for new ties in the West to fight off the isolation imposed on her by Russia, the ending of the war in South Vietnam would remove one major obstacle to better trade relations with the West. This is an ideal time for the West to negotiate.

### Two Different Policies Toward Communism

Unfortunately we still have two basic policies for dealing with Communist regimes. In Eastern Europe we seem to have given up containment for conciliation. We reward the Kadar government in Hungary for liberalization at home by resuming relations. We continue to give support to Gomulka in Poland as a means of encouraging some independence of Russia. Ever since Tito's break with Stalin, we have moved away from the notion that the Communist world is a faceless monolith run from Moscow, and sought to foster centrifugal forces within it. But in the Far East, as in our dealings with Cuba, we still cling to the older view that the only way to deal with a revolutionary movement is to do all in our power to starve it out. If we were treating East Asia as we treat East Europe, we would be actively exploring the differences between China and Russia, and those between North Vietnam and China, for leverage with which to end the costly uprising in South Vietnam. But we still think of China and of North Vietnam, as we did in the twenties of Russia, as untouchable regimes.

The lack of a constructive policy in East Asia becomes more understandable when one looks back and sees that the change in our policy toward Eastern Europe was a reaction to events in that area rather than the result of any diplomatic initiatives on our part. Churchill, after Stalin died, flew to Washington and urged us to negotiate with Melenkov, but the State Department insisted nothing had changed. It was not until the 20th Congress and the upsurges to which it gave rise in Hungary and Poland that we began to recognize belatedly that something was happening in the Soviet world. The policy of detente in recent months was largely made in Moscow, and our continued freeze in the Far East also shares the made in Moscow label. For suddenly the conflict between the Chinese and Russian ruling bureaucracies has led the latter to seek the isolation of China. Thus Russian policy and the policy imposed on us by our China lobby converged. The path of least resistance was to accept Russian overtures in the West—while pursuing the old rigid cold war policy in the Far East.

It should be obvious by now that problems arising in territories contiguous to China can no more be settled without her than Caribbean prolems can be settled without the United States. The Chinese taught us a lesson at the 38th parallel in Korea which we seem unwilling to acknowledge at the 17th parallel in Vietnam. China in effect warned us that if we crossed the 38th parallel it would intervene; its "volunteers" forced us back to the parallel. To end the Korean war, we had to negotiate with China. The West had to negotiate with China to settle the Laotian conflict. There will have to be negotiations with China again to end the South Vietnamese war.

The primary obstacle to the negotiation of such a settlement lies in Washington. Kennedy cannot afford to go into the campaign next year and face a Republican cry that under the Democrats we "lost" Vietnam, whether by withdrawal or negotiation. The politically safest course is to "stand firm," i.e. to follow the line of least resistance, though this means continuation of a war that most observers agree cannot be won, and could at any time expand dangerously. As in

## Where Do The Viets Get Their Weapons

**Q. General, does Viet Cong get its recruitment and arms at this point mainly through infiltration through Laos or Cambodia or mainly from inside South Vietnam?**

**Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, U.S. Army Chief of Staff: It is a combination. . . . They get arms from about three different sources. One, stuff that is actually toted in from up in North Vietnam. For example, we found 57-millimeter recoilless rifles made in China as far south as the Delta. They also have some local production of weapons. These are usually rifles of a kind. They are very crude. Single-shot affairs, but if they hit you they will kill you. There is no doubt about that. Then, of course, some of the stuff is captured from the Vietnamese.**

**To answer a question I know someone will ask, we are now capturing more weapons from the Viet Cong than they are capturing from the Vietnamese.**

*—Briefing at the Pentagon, Feb. 4, 1963.*

**Compare This The Official Myth With the Box Below**

## McNamara Blushes To Learn that Captured Viet Cong Rifles Are U.S. Made

**Saigon, Vietnam, Oct. 13—When Robert S. McNamara was inspecting South Vietnamese defenses recently, he paused curiously before a display of weapons captured from the Communist Viet Cong. Pointing to one in the pile, the Secretary of Defense asked, "This one's from Communist China, isn't it?"**

**"No," replied a Vietnamese officer. "It's an American 57-millimeter recoilless rifle, seized by the Viet Cong and recaptured by us."**

**McNamara, blushing, turned to Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, and said, "My God, I didn't recognize it." McNamara had reason to feel embarrassed. For the biggest supplier of modern weapons to the Viet Cong guerrillas is the United States. An official American breakdown of a cross-section of arms taken from the Viet Cong in recent weeks shows that nearly one out of three was marked "made in the US." And only one in 50 came from the Communist bloc. These were mostly Chinese but included some dated Czech and Soviet models.**

**About half the total weaponry of the pro-Communist forces is what the military lump together as "French and old"—all made before the French evacuated Indo-China in 1954 and some tracing to the World War I era. . . .**

**The official military line is that the weapons captured by the Viet Cong are not so important when it is remembered that Government troops are taking arms from them, too. For the first six months of 1963 for example figures show that the Government side lost 3,000 weapons and captured 2,700. But the statistics are deceiving in view of the difference in the quality of the arms exchanged. The Viet Cong yields largely outmoded weapons and home-made pipe guns and obtains factory fresh American models.**

**As one informed observer put it, "the weapons exchange figures would be encouraging only if we were in the plumbing business."**

*—Louis R. Rukeyser in the Baltimore Sun, Oct. 14.*

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France, the national interest is to be subordinated to the convenience of the political leadership; we will go on pouring out blood and treasure; we have already sunk some $5 billions in the Indochinese quagmire. The Administration's hope is by a little pressure on Diem, at least for some face-saving reforms, and a lot of flim-flam at home, to keep this tragic comedy going at least until after the 1964 elections. The political realities of Washington, not the military realities in Saigon, explain the Oct. 2 White House statement that Gen. Taylor and Secretary McNamara had "reported their judgment that the major part of the U.S. military task" in South Vietnam "can be completed by the end of 1965," i.e. a year after the elections. Never was a crystal ball more clearly clouded by politics.

## Kennedy's Moral Responsibility

The outcry about Diem diverts attention from the policies of Kennedy. The inhumanity which has made a world scandal of South Vietnam has its origin as much in Washington as in Saigon. The uprooting of the rural population and its incarceration in stockaded villages, the spraying of poisons from the air on crops and cattle in violation of the Geneva convention, the use of napalm for attacks on villages suspected of harboring rebels—these policies were all formulated and directed out of Washington. The familiar belief that the end justifies the means in any conflict with Communism was enough to wipe out qualms, if any, about the mistreatment of the Vietnamese. It was only the unexpected clash with the Buddhists which brought relations between Washington and Saigon to a crisis. The spectacle of a U.S. supported Catholic family dictatorship oppressing the majority creed, the international repercussions in the Buddhist world and Kennedy's own Catholicism made this most embarrassing. Above all, in the cant of the cold war, religion is sacred, God being regarded as safely on our side in the struggle against "athe-

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## How The War Against Diem Started

**"What happened in South Vietnam during the next five years deserves to be listed near the top of the success stories of the postwar period. By plebiscite, the Emperor Bao Dai was replaced by a Republic, with Ngo Dinh Diem as President, with an elected National Assembly, and a written Constitution. . . .**

**"Although North Vietnam inherited most of the industry of Vietnam, and although its population is larger, it fell rapidly behind South Vietnam in food production, the number of children in school, and in standards of living. . . . This was competition which the Communists apparently could not endure. Very likely it was one of the reasons why they decided in 1959 to renew their assault on South Vietnam."**

*—Secretary of State Rusk, "The Stake in Vietnam", before the Economic Club of New York, April 22, 1963.*

**Compare This The Official Myth With the Box Below**

## Noted French Historian Describes How the Uprising Against Diem Began

**The "mistakes" of the South, from 1957 onwards, were to furnish opportunities to Communism and to the movement for reunification which operated under its aegis. As if not satisfied with the re-establishment of calm and security, the Diem regime, haunted by a strange desire to bring back into being the society of former days, when there were no sects and no Communists, and reckoning that it would itself be safe in the future, accentuated its authoritarian and repressive character. There are serious reasons for supposing that it was encouraged along this path by certain American activist milieux. . . .**

**The Diem government . . . launched out in 1957 in to what amounted to a series of man hunts. . . . A considerable number of people were arrested in this way and sent to concentration camps. . . . This repression was in theory aimed at the Communists. In fact, it affected all those, and they were many—democrats, socialists, liberals, adherents of the sects—who were bold enough to express their disagreement with the line of policy adopted by the ruling oligarchy. . . .**

**In 1958 the situation grew worse. Round-ups of "dissidents" became more frequent and more brutal. The enemy (those suspected of Communist activities or of being affiliated to the sects) were difficult to apprehend. The areas where they took refuge . . . with their marshes and forests, were not favorable for operations by government forces. Moreover the way in which many of the operations were carried out very soon set the villagers against the regime.**

**The Communists, finding themselves hunted down, began to fight back. Informers were sought out and shot in increasing numbers, and village chiefs who had presided over the denunciations, village notables and members of the militia who took part, were frequently treated in the same way. The people of the villages, thus intimidated, fell silent. Diem's police and army saw their sources of information drying up one after another. To make good the lack, they resorted to worse barbarity, hoping to inspire an even greater terror among the villagers than that inspired by the Communists. And in that fateful year of 1958 they overstepped all bounds. The peasants, disgusted to see Diem's men acting in this way, lent their assistance to the Communists. . . .**

**In December 1958 the death of some 20 Viet Cong detainees in the Phu Loi concentration camp served to fan the flames of anger of the guerrillas. . . . In the course of that December and the following January armed bands sprang into being almost everywhere. . . .**

**What did the authorities of the Democratic Republic of (North) Vietnam do in the face of these sad circumstances? They protested in diplomatic notes. The members of the Viet Minh cadre in the south, who had been promised by Hanoi that unification would be rapidly achieved, had to listen to the bitter remarks that were made to them about the inability of the North to do anything about the Diem dictatorship. The overriding needs of the world-wide strategy of the Socialist camp meant little or nothing to guerrilla fighters being hunted down in Nam-Bo.**

**It was in such a climate of feeling that, in 1959, responsible elements of the Communist Resistance in Indo-China came to the conclusion that they had to act, whether Hanoi wanted them to or no. They could no longer continue to stand by while their supporters were arrested, thrown into prison and tortured. . . .**

**The point of view of most foreign governments, especially in the West, is that the fighting going on in South Vietnam is simply a subversive campaign directed from Hanoi . . . it leaves out of account the fact that the insurrection existed before the Communists decided to take part, and that they were simply forced to join in. And even among the Communists, the initiative did not originate in Hanoi, but from the grass roots, where the people were literally driven by Diem to take up arms in self-defense.**

*—Philippe Devillers. French scholar who lived for some years in Vietnam during the Indochinese war and once admired Diem. His book, Histoire du Vietnam 1945-51 has become a standard work on the causes and early stages of that war. This excerpt is from North Vietnam Today: Profile of a Communist Satellite, ed. by P. J. Honey (Praeger, 1962).*



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istic communism." Religious persecution could not be reconciled with holy war. So Mr. Kennedy in his interview with Walter Cronkite on CBS Sept. 2 ventured the opinion that "in the last two months the government" of Diem "has gotten out of touch with the people." This ranks with the best understatements of our time; Diem quite obviously has been out of touch with his people a good deal longer than two months.* Mr. Kennedy condemned the repression of the Buddhists but again his choice of words was tepid; he called it "very unwise." The words reflect neither moral revulsion nor human sympathy but only cool calculation. At a press conference a week later he summed up his policy. The test of official action in our government or Diem's was to be whether it might "handicap the winning of the war." This, and not justice for the people of South Vietnam or the establishment of a decent regime there, is our No. 1 aim. All else is subordinate to it. When the main objective is thus military, our main reliance is on the Pentagon and on cloak-and-dagger operations. The government becomes a prisoner of the end and the means it chooses. The type of men, mentality and institution brought into play determines the course of events and constricts the choice of alternatives.

## Kindred Spirits

The CIA's dominant outlook, even more under McCone than under Dulles, sees Communist conspiracy in every type of colonial struggle and gravitates instinctively to repressive measures for dealing with it. The alliance between the CIA and Ngo Dinh Nhu, whose special forces—his Storm Troopers —have been getting $3,000,000 a year from CIA, is not accidental but reflects a kinship of spirit; McCone's religious and apocalyptic views are much like those of Vietnam's ruling family. The President has recalled John H. Richardson, the CIA chief in Saigon, under pressure from Ambassador Lodge, but there is no way of knowing what if any changes in CIA policy will be made. A cloak-and-dagger organization is by its very nature hard to control. It is difficult enough for the White House to keep a firm rein on the State Department a few blocks away; it is almost impossible to control a distant underground operation attracting a local entourage of informers eager to jump on the gravy train. The intelligence supplied by such a network is probably a good deal less reliable and perceptive than that which the careful reader can get for himself from the American, British and French press. Certainly no one following the press reports would have been as silly as was Secretary McNamara when he told a Congressional committee that there were three times as many Catholics as Buddhists in South Vietnam, and that the latter constituted only about ten percent of the population. This was a real scoop, comparable to the discovery that Ireland is largely populated by Protestants.

Whether Secretary McNamara was the victim in this of the CIA or of military intelligence no one knows. But the latter, too, must be a rich source of misinformation. Louis R. Rukeyser in the last of a revealing 6-part series from Saigon in the *Baltimore Sun* Oct. 18 wrote that at the military headquarters of Gen. Paul D. Harkins, "all is sweetness and light. The Viet Cong guerrillas are being licked, one is told, and it is only a matter of time before the assisting Americans can go home victorious." The French had a whole series of such Generals in Indochina; victory was always just around the corner.

The Kennedy Administration, like Eisenhower's and Truman's before it, has carried on its Indochinese policies behind a thick smokescreen of official falsification. The contrast between propaganda and reality is visible in Eisenhower's forthcoming memoirs (*Mandate for Change*: Doubleday) where Ike begins his part of this story by describing the Vietminh in the customary way as "so-called 'patriots'" and "Chinese supported rebels." He recalls with approval the NATO

### The Situation In the Villages

**"The first target was the people themselves. The patient poor farmers were given the choice either of supporting the Viet Cong by providing supplies and recruits or of suffering violence. . . . Another important target were the civil servants of the Republic. . . . Hundreds . . . have been murdered by this Viet Cong terror. Their sacrifice must not be forgotten for it was made for all free men."**

*—Roger Hilsman, Ass't Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, at the 1963 Conference on Cold War Education, Tampa, Fla., June 14, 1963.*

**Compare This The Official Myth With the Box Below**

### Independent Observers Report Quite A Different Picture from The Villages

**"In the countryside many of Diem's officials came to regard their government jobs as open licenses for larceny. They often extorted money from the peasants, demanding protection money from merchants and manipulated the prices farmers got for their crops. Thus the Viet Cong guerrillas could gain popular approval by occasionally murdering a corrupt official. Soon they had thousands of peasants eager to supply them with rice and information."**

*—Don Schanche: Saturday Evening Post. Jan. 6, 1962.*

**"Out in the more remote villages of mud and wattle, the government is identified as the man in uniform who comes on a punitive raid, or with a heavy bodyguard, and who always wants something—money, labor or even those suspected, sometimes incorrectly, of working for the Viet Cong.**

**"The Viet Cong cadre, on the other hand, is barefooted and dressed in black like every other peasant. He makes tax demands, but they are not excessive. He is meticulous about paying for food and lodging, and scrupulous, also, in his relations with village girls and with the villagers' property. To begin with, he does not talk Communism or Marxism, but exploits local grievances, and is at pains to implant the idea that the Vietnamese have thrown off French colonialism only to be saddled by President Diem with American colonialism. It is simple propaganda, but effective."**

*—Denis Warner: The Last Confucian (Macmillan, 1963)*

*** Diem seems to be out of touch altogether. The Australian newspaperman, Denis Warner, in his new book, The Last Confucian, writes, "Diem talks but never listens; he looks but never sees. Any Ambassador who can get in 500 words in a 4-hour conversation with him feels that he is just about hitting par for the course. Diem talks monotonously and repetitively, rambling from one subject to another and never talking a problem through . . . never does he spark with humor. Twin threads of thought provide the only continuity. One is the assumption that he is right and knows best; the other that he is the victim of lies and calumny."**

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resolution of Dec. 17, 1952, on the basis of which the Truman Administration next day launched its program of military aid to the French. This resolution said the war "was essential to the defense of liberty" and "in harmony with the ideals and aims of NATO." But Ike himself could not have taken these ringing phrases very seriously. For he confesses that he did not want to intervene in 1954 without at least token forces from other nations to "lend real moral standing to a venture that otherwise could be made to appear as a brutal example of imperialism." This need "was particularly acute" Ike adds, "because there was no incontrovertible evidence of overt Red Chinese participation in the Indochinese conflict." Later in the story Ike makes another admission that the government did its best at the time to keep from the American people. "I have never talked or corresponded with a person knowledgeable in Indochinese affairs," Ike now discloses, "who did not agree that had elections been held as of the time of the fighting, possibly 80 percent of the population would have voted for Ho Chi Minh." What the government said in public was very different from what it knew in private. The truth then and since has been that we were financing a war to impose on the Vietnamese a regime they did not want, first that of the French and then that of Diem.

### Our Official Mythology

An elaborate mythology has been built up by the Kennedy Administration to cloak our role in what the French are calling the second Indochinese war. The first article of faith in this mythology is that the war broke out not because of Diem's failure to satisfy his people's aspirations in South Vietnam but because of his success. As Kennedy wrote Diem Oct. 26, 1961, "The Communist response to the growing strength and prosperity of your people was to send terror into your villages, to burn your new schools and to make ambushes of your new roads." This myth was further amplified in the two volume Blue Book on the war put out by the State Department a few weeks later, "A Threat to the Peace: North Vietnam's Effort to Conquer South Vietnam." Here the genesis of the war was spelled out even more glamorously,

### Rusk Hails Democracy Under Diem

**"Critics have complained that South Vietnam is not a full constitutional democracy and that our aid has been subject to waste and mismanagement. Let us make clear that these criticisms are not merely alibis for inaction. For in passing judgment, let us recall that we are talking about a nation which has been responsible for its own affairs for less than a decade, about a people who have had no peace since 1941 and little experience in direct participation in political affairs. Their four national elections, their thousands of elected hamlet councils, and their forthcoming village council elections show steady movement toward a constitutional system resting upon popular consent."**

*—Secretary of State Rusk, "The Stake in Vietnam", before the Economic Club in New York, April 22, 1963.*

**Compare This The Official Myth With the Box Below**

"The years 1956 to 1960 produced something close to an economic miracle in South Vietnam. . . . The economic and social advances scored by the South Vietnamese up to last year made it plain that Hanoi's program for peaceful takeover had little or no chance of success. If they were to win the Communists had to resort to force. . . . South Vietnam was outstripping the North in the same fashion that West Germany had exceeded the achievements of the 'socialist' East. The leaders in Hanoi apparently could not accept that prospect. They decided on a course of violence. . . ." The State Department has never tried to sell more obvious nonsense. Guerrilla war cannot be stirred up among a contented people. Yet this has been the official line ever since.

In part this myth was made necessary by the position Kennedy took on Vietnam in the 1960 campaign. The book of foreign policy speeches edited by the distinguished historian Allan Nevins for the campaign as Kennedy's "Strategy of Peace" also hailed, and virtually took credit for, "a near miracle" in South Vietnam. One of the speeches was made in 1956 to Diem's sounding board in this country, the American Friends of Vietnam. Nevins said "exceptional interest"

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## A Leading Authority on Vietnam Describes the Realities of Government by Diem

**"On April 26, 1960, 18 highly respected citizens, including several former Cabinet Ministers, submitted an open letter to Ngo Dinh Diem, warning him of the disaffection of the people:**

**" 'A Constitution has been established in form only; a National Assembly exists whose deliberations always fall into line with the Government; anti-democratic elections—all these are methods and "comedies" copied from the dictatorial Communist regimes. . . . Continuous arrests fill the jails and the prisons to the rafters . . . public opinion and the press are reduced to silence. . . .'**

**"With the progressive destruction of even the hope of institutional reform from within, all opposition to the Diem regime has had to be of a revolutionary nature. The paratroop putsch of November 11, 1960, was the first indication of that new ugly mood, although it was conducted, as its own leaders took pains to point out, in a 'gentlemanly' fashion. . . .**

**Having survived the putsch, the regime, in a first fright, announced on Nov. 17 a 'sweeping reform program.' But at the same time . . . began a 'purge' of known oppositionists. The Committee arrested the 18 signers of the April 26 manifesto, and coached mobs ransacked the offices of five newspapers that had shown themselves lukewarm towards the regime. . . .**

**"When the promised reforms were finally unveiled on Feb. 13, 1961 . . . they were hardly of the kind that would win the support of the villages. The bulk of the 'reform' consisted simply of promises that the various judicial and economic institutions embodied in the 1956 constitution would finally be brought to life and that—now that the villages were heavily Communist-infiltrated — provincial, municipal and village councils would be set up again. No promise was made that they would be elective in character, as they traditionally had been in Vietnam before during the colonial era and even in the midst of the Indochina War under the defunct Bao-Dai regime. . . .**

**"Thus the long awaited establishment of local self-government, widely considered to be essential to the success of the 'strategic hamlet' program, also became a meaningless distortion. In May, 1963, however, Saigon finally yielded to American advisers who maintained that the only way to win over the village population was to give it some real responsibility . . . the new 'reform' will leave the villages about as much leeway as the Communist village administration does."**

*—Bernard B. Fall of Howard Univ. in his forthcoming book, "The Two Viet-Nams" (Praeger).*



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attached to this speech because despite fears at the time—

**the faith of friends like Senator Kennedy was actually well founded. The U.S. had the wisdom to grant South Vietnam about $500 million in various forms of assistance. . . . The little republic truly became what Mr. Kennedy calls it, a proving ground of democracy. It has produced in its President, Ngo Dinh Diem, one of the true statesmen of the new Asia. . . . Vietnam is a country of which the West may feel proud.**

It would have been embarrassing to admit so soon that our statesman friend was a bust. A second reason for the myth that the revolt against Diem was fomented from outside was to marshal international support against it. In his speech to the UN General Assembly in New York Sept. 25, 1961, Kennedy cited South Vietnam as a threat to the peace. "South Vietnam," the President said, "is already under attack—sometimes by a single assassin, sometimes by a band of guerrillas, recently by full battalions. . . . No one can call these 'wars of liberation.' For these are free countries living under their own governments."

## JFK's Own Troubles With Diem

But this picture of a peaceful and democratic regime attacked from outside soon became difficult to reconcile with Kennedy's own troubles with the Diem regime. Two months later (Nov. 29) he was questioned at press conference about the bitter attacks suddenly launched against the U.S. by "the government controlled press in Vietnam, apparently because we are asking for political reforms in exchange for our military and economic assistance." Kennedy in a rather fumbling reply said the U.S. was trying to get the Diem government to take "steps which will increase the sense of commitment by the people of Vietnam to the struggle." If Vietnam was a prosperous and democratic state, why this worry about an inadequate sense of commitment to the struggle by its people?

The truth is that the problem was not one of "inadequate commitment" by the people to the Diem regime but of positive hostility. To go through a pile of books and articles on the revolt against Diem as I have been doing in the past few weeks and to compare these unofficial accounts with the official pronouncements of the Kennedy Administration is a disturbing experience. On each page of this week's special issue, I have given a sample of these official myths and with each an excerpt from some independent scholar or journalist writing on the same subject. The reader will quickly see from these contrasting "boxes" that on every major aspect of the war the Kennedy Administration has sought to deceive the country. To bolster up these myths, it has cooperated with the Diem regime in making it as difficult as possible for independent American journalists to get the truth. Only a few weeks ago the Moss subcommittee on government information of the House of Representatives reported (Sept. 26) that

**"In recent weeks the American public has been surprised by developments in Vietnam—developments which have been many months in the making but which the American people are just now discovering. The restrictive U.S. press policy in Vietnam—drafted in the State Department's public relations office by an official with an admitted distrust for the people's right to know—unquestionably contributed to the lack of information about conditions in Vietnam which created an international crisis. Instead of hiding the facts from the American public, the State Department should have done everything possible to expose the true situation to full view."**

The final sentence is incredibly naive. In 30 years experience, the writer has never yet known the State Department to expose any true situation to full view. "Papa knows best" has always been its basic attitude. The official criticized, very unfairly, since he was only conforming to the department's tra-

(Continued on Page Eight)

### Diem's Land Reform

**"A land reform program, patterned on the land reforms in Japan and on Taiwan, was pressed forward—123,000 heads of families become small landowners. A comprehensive system of agricultural credit was set up. Thousands of Vietnamese were moved into the highlands to raise industrial crops."**

*—Secretary of State Rusk, "The Stake in Vietnam", before the Economic Club in New York, April 22, 1963.*

**Compare This The Official Myth With the Box Below**

## Diem's Land Reform As Summed Up By A Reporter With Long Experience in Indo-China

**A meager 1.4% of U.S. aid, or $15 million, went to agriculture between 1955 and 1960. The much vaunted rural help program did not exist. Land reform was a flop. . . .**

**"In marked contrast to the land reform on Taiwan, where landlords were allowed to keep only 3 hectares (about 7 acres) of medium-grade paddy field or twice that area of dry land, or in Japan, where ten acres of land in the rice areas was a family minimum, South Vietnam's land reform has been anything but radical. A landlord in South Vietnam may retain up to 100 hectares of rice land and another 15 hectares for burial grounds and ancestor worship. . . .**

**"The program lacked regulatory machinery to control tenant-landlord registration, and all sorts of side arrangements were entered into to defeat its intention. In Central Vietnam, where there are at least 100,000 farms of one hectare or less, each village has public lands which, in theory, it rents out at reasonable rates to the poorest peasants. The idea is that the public lands should provide both village revenue and relief. In practice, the system usually works as yet another means for squeeze and graft by appointed village chiefs and one of the worst forms of land exploitation. No security of tenure is given beyond the crop year, and there is no incentive for crop or land improvement when the poor peasants are allowed on the land. More often than not they do not get a chance at all, and the land goes to the richest and most prominent landlord.**

**"In areas where a lack of security had for many years prevented the landlords from visiting or collecting rents from their properties, the peasants regarded Diem's land reform as an added tax, or worse. . . . All they knew was that Diem had brought the landlords back. To be sure, they had to pay taxes to the Viet Minh and were liable to compulsory service as porters or as guerrillas, but they knew the money did not go to the profit of absentee landlords. Thus, in September 1957, when they discovered that in addition to the payment of what they regarded as exorbitant rentals, they now faced the payment of high prices (from $7 to $428 a hectare) for land they had once all but regarded as their own they did not often respond with the enthusiasm that Saigon and Washington attributed to them."**

*—Denis Warner, an Australian journalist who has been covering Indo-China since World War II, writing in his newly published book, "The Last Confucian." (Macmillan).*

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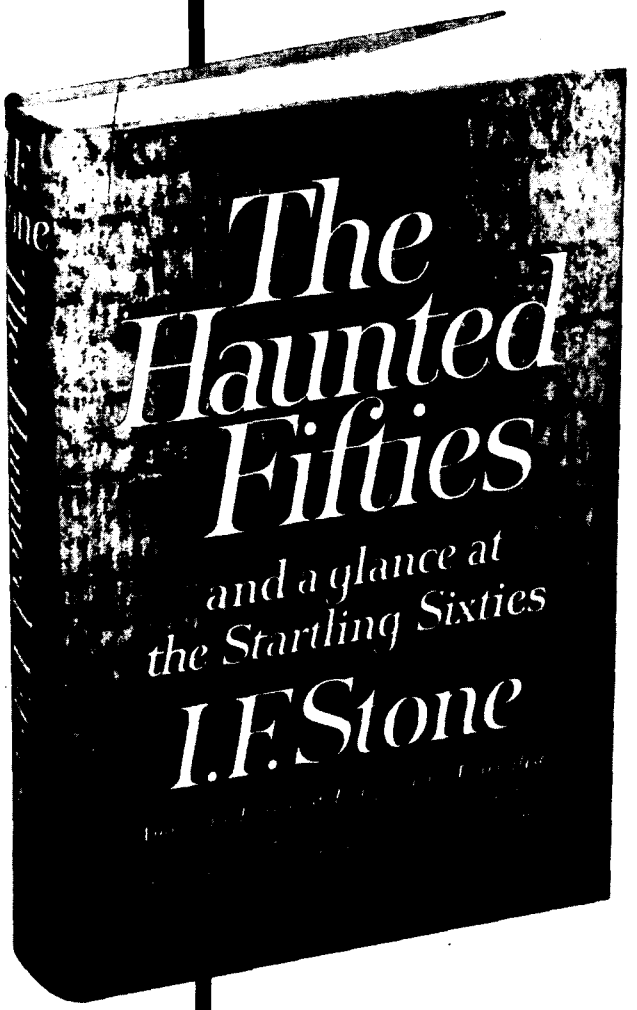


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# Freedom of Information Is A No. 1 Casualty of The War

*(Continued from Page Six)*

ditional press policy, is Carl T. Rowan, now Ambassador to Finland, then Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs. The Moss subcommittee called attention to a speech in which Rowan talked of the public's "right *not* to know," said that "in a period of undeclared war, we constantly must decide how far we can go in providing the well-informed populace without which a 'free society' becomes a mockery without violating our oath to protect this country" and complained that too few newspapers "are willing to weigh their stories against the national interest." But the Moss subcommittee did not mention that Rowan was only developing ideas put forward a few months earlier after the Cuban debacle by Kennedy in his speech before the American Newspaper Publishers Association. The purport of that speech was that if and when the government decided on a policy of undeclared war, the press ought not to publish matters which would let the public know what is going on. The effort to manage the news has never been more blatant than on Vietnam.

## The Army Prints A Birchite View

In some military circles suspicion of the press seems to have reached Birchite dimensions. Thus Dr. Fall, in his book, "The Two Vietnams," discloses that the U.S. Army's most respected publication, the *Military Review* of the U.S. Army Command and Staff College, ran an article in its May 1962 by Suzanne Labin "a French socialist with extreme right wing leanings."

The article, according to Dr. Fall, "flatly accuses anyone who does not support Ngo Dinh Diem . . . of being a participant in an immense campaign . . . launched by the Communists and their dupes." A milder variant of the same conspiracy charge was made by Joseph Alsop, always a faithful satellite of the military, in a column of Sept. 23. While generously absolving his colleagues in Saigon of being under Communist influence, Alsop accuses them of engaging in a deliberate campaign to discredit and unnerve Diem. This may help to explain why Also seems to be Mme. Nhu's favorite correspondent: Dr. Fall in his book recalls that even *Time* once poked fun at her for suggesting creation of a committee of foreign correspondents, preferably headed by Alsop, to hammer out a general line to which they would all adhere, just like the boys on *Pravda*. This was another glimpse of the mentality Robert Guillian described in *Le Monde* (April 16, 1961). "One sees South Vietnam," he wrote from Saigon, which has since barred him, "by a strange and fascinating mimicry, borrow part of its methods from North Vietnam and China, and transform itself more and more into a bad copy of a Communist totalitarian regime." The desperate attempt to hide the truth about this hopeless but savage war is pulling our government in the same direction, toward the rewriting of history in an attempt to impose a party line myth on the press and public. Unless there is a counter campaign of pressure to bring home the truth, the war will drag on, poisoning the air of freedom at home, imposing misery on the bewildered people of South Vietnam and risking a wider conflagration.

### On Spraying Poison From The Air

**Q. How successful, General, has your aerial spray program been to destroy rice crops of the Viet Cong and their hiding places in underbrush?**

**Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, Chief of Staff, U.S. Army: I don't think I'd better comment on that, if you don't mind.**

*—Briefing at the Pentagon, Feb. 4, 1963.*

**"Recently there have been efforts [in Vietnam] to pierce this cover in forest areas by having airplanes spray out defoliants—chemicals which will poison and kill the leaves. Such sprays are used commercially along the rights of way of railroads and power lines in America, but their real utility in operations against guerrillas still seems open to question. To obtain meaningful results large areas have to be treated and in the tropics new growth appears distressingly quickly. Then too there are serious psychological and political drawbacks. The government's act of spraying poison from the air, no matter how carefully the flights are directed, is not likely to endear it to the population of the region concerned. . . . The insurgents are certain to blame all subsequent crop failures and epidemics on these tactics and a considerable number of people may believe them."**

*—James Eliot Cross: Conflict in the Shadows. The Nature and Politics of Guerrilla War (1963).*

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